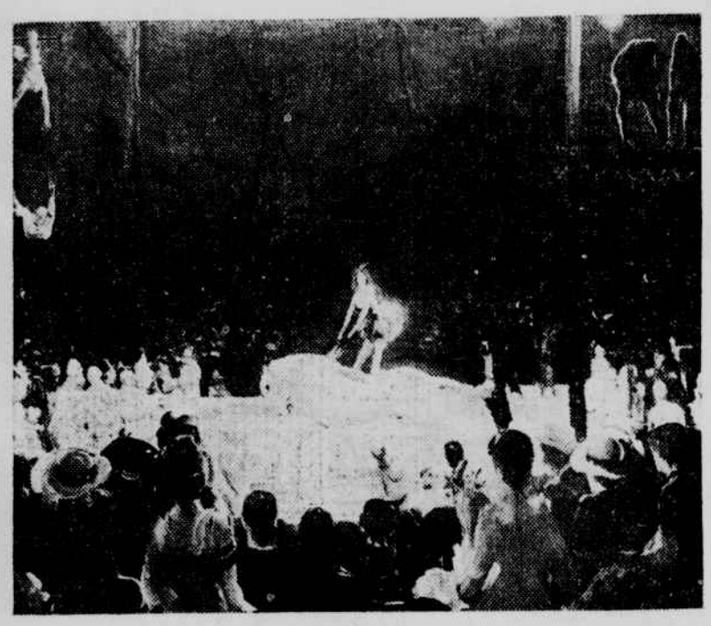
MATTERS of ART

DESIGN: THE BIRTH OF TRAGEDY.
(From the drawing by Arthur B. Davies.)

American Work in the Independent Salon.

There is a great deal of pure enjoyment to be got out of the international show at the 69th Regiment Armory—a great deal of the pleasure that consists in idly drifting from one interesting picture to another. When the visitor has once left behind him the foolish Terrorists who were traversed in this place last Sunday he may find abundant balm for his soul in many different categories of art. Puvis de Chavannes, for example, and Matthew Maris, and Albert Ryder, and divers others to whom we shall presently return, are illustrated by works which delightfully exert the gentle, healing spell of beauty. But this exhibition is nothing if not a source of stimulus, a challenge to criticism, and one of the things that it urgently invites us to do is to take stock, so to say, of American art in so far as it is here represented. After all, it was not merely for the exploitation of Post-Impressionism and Cubism that this show was organized. The aim of the Association of American Painters and Sculptors was also to bring out the significance of certain conditions on this side of the water. Native work fills most of the space, and quite apart from this physical fact it is plain that we have to reckon with the Independents; with those of our artists who are working, or believe they are working, in the van. What, precisely, are they doing and what is it worth? These are the really pressing questions developed by the whole affair.



CIRCUS.
(From the painting by George Bellows.)

The Lesson Enforced by Mr. Alden Weir.

In seeking to answer them it is well to begin, as we did last Sunday, at the beginning, which is to say with French Impressionism. There are some fine examples of the school on the walls, from which the student may easily see what it was that set some of our own painters upon a new path. Manet showed them the virtues of pure color, applied in bold, direct fashion, and we shall by and by be tracing his influence; but at the outset Monet is the more suggestive type. He it was who taught us the vibration of color under the light of the open air, and it was in emulation of his broken tones and his pervasive luminosity that our latter day innovators found their account. Several of them are represented on this occasion, and on the whole Mr. Alden Weir is the hero of the group. They are all types of high ability. It is interesting to note how the pictures by the late J. H. Twachtman and the late Theodore Robinson hold their own in the company of masters like Manet, Monet and Whistler. Mr. Childe Hassam, too, richly exemplifies the ease and effectiveness with which the Impressionistic hypothesis was adopted here. But without drawing up anything so futile as a class list or making any invidious comparisons we may nevertheless choose Mr. Weir as a peculiarly helpful source of light on our problem.

What was the value of French Impressionism to American art? Its value could only be that of a means to an end, of an influence fertilizing individualized work. Turn to Mr. Weir's pictures and you will see the perfect proof. The present writer can well remember this artist's earlier experiments in the open air, how indecisive they were, and how poor a substitute for the method he had previously employed. As time went on and successive exhibitions revealed the steps in his progress it seemed as if he would never conclusively master the new principles. Then, through sheer "keeping at it," he demonstrated his essential authority. The old hesitations fell away, the note of imitation absolutely disappeared, and it was obvious that Weir was not to be designated even as an Impressionist, but just as an original painter. He had made his Impressionism a means to an end, a means of expressing himself. That is why the panel containing four or five of his pictures in this exhibition enforces perhaps the best lesson that the latter affords.

He exercises the true function of the artist, which is to learn his trade and then produce beautiful pictures. He does not make a fetich of his method. He is not enslaved by his pigment. Impressionism was not with him a formula to be trotted out again and again for its own sake. It was simply one more string to his bow, or, if we may change the figure, a kind of unconscious accretion, enriching his talent without altering its fundamental direction. That direction in the work of Alden Weir is steadily toward beauty, toward charm. And observe how his assimilation and control of the Impressionist idea as part, not the whole, of his equipment has left him his freedom. He does not repeat himself nor is his range in any way restricted. In his little group of paintings there is a flower piece, there is a landscape, there are a couple of portraits. In each one of these works he makes you feel that he has been really stirred by his theme and has managed to express its very spirit. To each one he gives a distinctive character. What is the result? You mark him at once as not only a man of technique but a man of style. It is in the latter capacity more particularly that he provides us with an invaluable touchstone wherewith to test quantities of other things in the show. It is not the new method, freakish or otherwise, that draws us to this or that episode; it is the use made of a given method, the development out of it of those finer, more personal effects which spell not a factitious "movement" but a creative force.

Dexterity the Keynote of the New Mode.

Pursuing the search for this precious phenomenon one is conscious at the back of his mind of a good deal that has happened prior to the opening of this exhibition. One remembers certain shows and the talk that went on about them, the assertion of individuality outraged by academic ill treatment, the cry for wider liberty, for more generous encouragement. Back of all this one understood there struggled a band of artists, most of them still young, who were dissatisfied with prevailing traditions and insisted upon speaking out in their own way. We have seen how Weir, Hassam and others profited by the example of Monet when that was comparatively fresh. They have gone on in sedate mood toward their broadened horizon, and unnumbered American artists have in one way or another followed their leadership. But the Independents, the artists with whom we have to-day to deal, coming later upon the scene, have sought an even more advanced tradition. We wonder if to them a man like Weir now seems old-fashioned? This would seem not unlikely, for the newer school is out of sympathy with his fastidious taste. It cares nothing for beauty as he understands it and nothing for suavity of surface. It reverts to impressionism, inasmuch as it takes a leaf from Manet's book, but, as it happens, that is only the leaf which relates to directness of statement. In borrowing that motive the Independents, as though bent upon a kind of wilful defiance, brutalize it to an extraordinary extent. The keynote to the current mode is nothing more or less than an exaltation of manual dexterity, accompanied by what we can only describe as a gross flouting of the artistic *convenances*. It is as though the artist wanted you to understand that he knew how to use his brushes, but had no nonsense about him and would not be caught permitting a trace of sensuous or spiritual beauty to creep into his work.

There is no link between our earlier Impressionism and these recent outcroppings of rebellion. The latter have no place in any sequence of artistic events, in any evolution of ideas. They simply stand for a sharp and, on the whole, sudden break with the existing order of things. So to consider them is in no wise to disparage them. A swift, violent change is not in itself necessarily harmful. But neither is there anything talismanic about it; neither is it necessarily a cause of good art, and in saying this we come pretty close to the secret of our Independents, and, by the same token, to an understanding of what they fail to do. Consideration of what they have failed to do has been rather forced upon us by the general drift of all that agitation which has been going forward for the last few years. One assumes that a new movement has tangible things to say for itself, that the men behind it, being unmistakably in revolt against constituted authority, have principles of their own to put in the place of those which they regard as outworn. Now, it is not clear that the Independents have any constructive campaign laid out or that they are doing anything to impugn the validity of what has gone before them. On the contrary, in going back into the studio and practically abandoning the magic of sunlight they would seem to have retrograded from the point at which modern art was left by the French Impressionists. Instead of extending and enriching the gamut of color they have cramped it within narrower limits. Their pure tints are often also ugly, opaque tints. A surprising number of the pictures here are either swamped in dull black or brown tones or go to the other extreme and split the welkin with the raucous row of their high-pitched crudities. Yet everybody is terribly in earnest. One cannot help feeling that they have put their heart into their work. These are artists passionately convinced that they are going somewhere, that they are going forward. What is it that they have unconsciously done, then, to make the spectator doubtful? In a vague tremor lest they descend upon prettiness they have shunned beauty. Fearful of drawing like Academicians they draw like navvies. Suspicious of the lure of poetry, which they imagine must have something "literary" about it, they give themselves up to the baldest kind of prose.

The Virtues of Energy and Truth.

There is no denying that this "rough and ready" conception of art promotes at once a feeling of disappointment, and even of distress. It is painful to have to admit that the Independents which we have just referred leads to a quaint misconception as to subject. The Independents are too exclusively absorbed in the delineation of every day, and even squalid, types. It is wise for the artist to paint what goes on about him, but New York life, for example, is not confined to the East Side or to Bohemia. Velasquez began by painting the humble figures of his *bodegones*, the peasants and water carriers of Seville, but it was not long before he dedicated himself to the portrayal of kings. The fact that we are interested in a caterpillar need not prevent our delighting in a butterfly. But this we note in passing. Once we have granted the Independents their preoccupation with not very attractive models, we may admire the zest and the skill with which they do their work. There we have the final source of the genuine pleasure to be extracted from this exhibition. It is inspiriting to come in contact with a company of artists so sincerely desirous of keeping their eyes upon the object, to paint it with unflinching fidelity to nature, and so manfully willing to let themselves go.

It hardly matters at all, from this point of view, that they have added nothing to our store of artistic ideas. To be genuine is to be of some significance in the world, and the honest robust vigor of these men is by itself enough to inspire sympathy. Furthermore, to note their poverty of invention is not by any means to say that they are bankrupt of personality, that indispensable ingredient of good art. Though it is impossible here to traverse the show in detail, minutely appraising picture after picture in a portentously large collection, we must pause if only for a moment on one or two leading types. We cannot ignore the distinction and the power which Mr. Davies shows in his "Design, Birth of Tragedy," and in the other drawing of a seated figure which hangs near by. There, for once, at least, we meet a man of ideas and a man with distinction of style. There is good reason, too, for lingering before the four or five paintings by George Bellows. His "Docks in Winter," his "Polo Crowd" and his "Circus" stamp him as an artist with an outlook of his own, a powerful technique, the makings of a style, and a dynamic force which stirs us as we are stirred by some triumphant masculine gesture. In his work, too, as in much else that the exhibition contains, we meet the note of character. Human beings are portrayed as such. If the Independents accomplish any reform in contemporary American art, it promises to be the abolition of the lay figure and the ruthless sweeping away of a vast amount of studio rubbish, the irrelevant accessories which are dragged into so many pictures as by main strength. They are not masters yet, these painters such as Bellows, Luks, Glackens, Sloan, Myers, and a dozen others, and if it had anything to do with our present purpose, we could without any difficulty indicate errors in this or that painting. But no matter how many mistakes are made, we rarely encounter the disastrous mistake of painting men and women as so much still life.

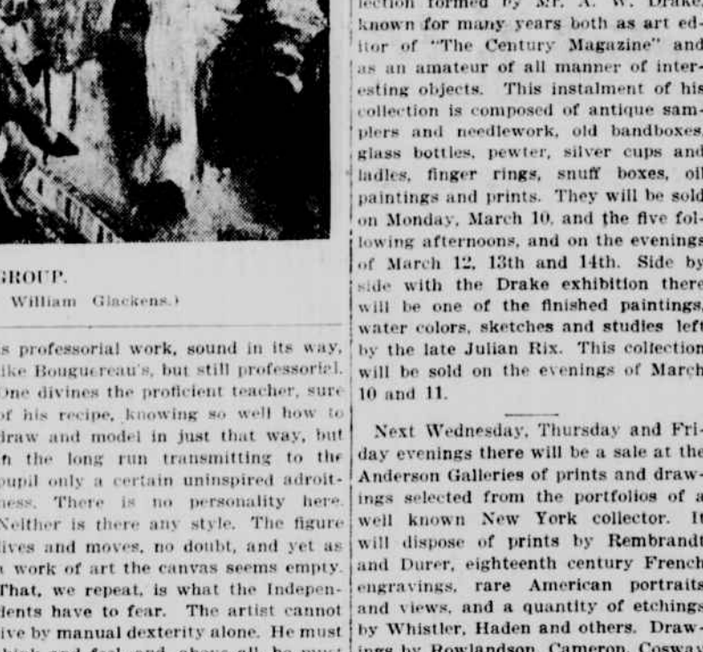
FAMILY GROUP.
(From the painting by William Glackens.)

The Future of the Independent Movement.

Of that pitfall the Independents scarcely need to be wary. Their avoidance of it is instinctive. There is no necessity of warning Mr. Guy Pene Du Bois against the mannikin. His little studies of New York types, full of technical promise, also show that he has the root of the matter in him and is feeling his way toward the very essence of character. But there is one danger to which many if not all of the Independents are exposed, and that is the danger of scorning one formula, only to become hidebound in the cultivation of another. The reflection is invited especially by a painter like Mr. Robert Henri. In his revival of the mode of Manet he has done a good quantity of prodigiously clever work. Technically he is one of the most sophisticated and able of our painters, and when he is in precisely the right mood, as when he made the portrait of a child called "The Red Top," he gives us a lasting satisfaction. This is technique that is worth while, technique wreaked upon a little slice of life and somehow endued with the breath of individuality. But when we contemplate this artist's "Figure in Motion," a full-length nude, it is in no spirit of paradox that we think automatically of a *chef d'ecole* like Bouguereau. At bottom this motive, like the motive characteristic of the French Academician, savors of the well worn studio mechanism. It is professorial work, sound in its way, like Bouguereau's, but still professorial. One divines the proficient teacher, sure of his recipe, knowing so well how to draw and model in just that way, but in the long run transmitting to the pupil only a certain uninspired adroitness. There is no personality here. Neither is there any style. The figure lives and moves, no doubt, and yet as a work of art the canvas seems empty. That, we repeat, is what the Independents have to fear. The artist cannot live by manual dexterity alone. He must think and feel, and, above all, he must strongly individualize what he does. Whether this memorable Salon is to prove a really helpful and constructive influence or is presently to be forgotten as having provided no more than the passing sensation of a winter, depends altogether upon the seriousness of the changes flowing from it. Are the Independents to repeat, each man in his own way, Mr. Weir's deeply significant experience? Are they to use their technique in the highest service of that truth and energy in which they are so rich, and prove that they have something to say to which people of discrimination are willing to listen? They cannot burke these questions, and, if the wholesome atmosphere of the exhibition goes for anything, they will not try to.

R. C.

OUTSKIRTS OF NEW YORK.
(From the painting by Ernest Lawson.)



MORNING.
(From the painting by Walt Kuhn.)

MISCELLANY

Some Further Incidents in a Crowded Season.

The Photo-Secession Gallery is filled with photographs by Mr. Alfred Stieglitz. It is interesting to see them there, but we cannot forbear noting that if any worker with a camera might have claimed admission for his prints at the Salon of the Independents it is Mr. Stieglitz. Visitors at the Armory, when they are studying Matisse and the rest, may well recall that it was in the Photo-Secession Gallery that so many of the "revolutionaries" were first introduced to the New York public. With his delightful breadth of mind, his enthusiasm for liberty and all those who fight for it, Mr. Stieglitz has been an exemplary pioneer. He, too, like Mr. Davies and the other leaders in the Association of American Painters and Sculptors, has been content to show new things on his walls and leave the spectator utterly free to judge for himself. His liberality is a noble trait, and there is no better occasion than this one for offering it a public tribute.

Yesterday there was opened at the Reinhardt Gallery a loan exhibition of portraits by Sargent, Sorolla, Boldini, Besnard, Melchers and others. It will last until March 15.

Twelve pastel portraits by Daniel Gardner have been placed on exhibition at the Cottier Gallery. Gardner was an English artist who enjoyed the favorable opinion of Reynolds. He died in London in 1805. One of his portraits was sold in 1908 for $6,550. He is practically unknown here, a fact lending special interest to this exhibition.

A number of paintings by Mr. Walter Gay, the American artist, who has long lived in Paris, will be placed on view this week at the Gimpel & Wildenstein Gallery. Among the pictures are several from private collections here and abroad, one has been lent by the Metropolitan Museum, and another comes from the Luxembourg. Presumably this collection will illustrate the work to which Mr. Gay has for some years confined himself, studies of interiors which turn decoration and furniture to charming pictorial purpose.

It is good news that the memorial exhibition in the gallery of the Berlin Photographic Company of the works of the late Robert Blum is not to be closed at once. Following the urgent request of a number of connoisseurs the show has been extended to March 8.

The current exhibition at the Macbeth Gallery is given to paintings by Mr. F. C. Frieseke. He is one of the cleverest of the younger men, showing good taste in color and a capital feeling for light, both in his interiors and in his garden scenes.

More sales are announced to take place at the American Art Galleries. Next Wednesday an exhibition will begin there of the first part of the collection formed by Mr. A. W. Drake, known for many years both as art editor of "The Century Magazine" and as an amateur of all manner of interesting objects. This instalment of his collection is composed of antique samplers and needlework, old bandboxes, glass bottles, pewter, silver cups and ladles, finger rings, snuff boxes, oil paintings and prints. They will be sold on Monday, March 10, and the five following afternoons, and on the evenings of March 12, 13th and 14th. Side by side with the Drake exhibition there will be one of the finished paintings, water colors, sketches and studies left by the late Julian Rix. This collection will be sold on the evenings of March 10 and 11.

Next Wednesday, Thursday and Friday evenings there will be a sale at the Anderson Galleries of prints and drawings selected from the portfolios of a well known New York collector. It will dispose of prints by Rembrandt and Durer, eighteenth century French engravings, rare American portraits and views, and a quantity of etchings by Whistler, Haden and others. Drawings by Rowlandson, Cameron, Cosway and others also figure in this collection.

WHAT WASHINGTON WAS THIS?

A letter to The London Telegraph.

In your interesting notice of Washington's Letters in your issue of Tuesday, the 21st, a passage occurs with regard to Washington and a commission in the British army. That he was born on February 22, 1732, is usually accepted, and that this event took place on that date is to be believed. But it is just possible that he was given a commission as an infant—a custom then in vogue. In the Public Record Office, sec. w. o. 25, No. 90, folio 44, we read:

"Washington, George, Gent., to be cornet en second in the Queen's Royal Regiment of Dragoons, commanded by Lieutenant General Sir John Cope. 14 March, 1743-4." He would then have been 12. I have searched everywhere to discover the identity of this George Washington, but in vain.

My object being to trace all the officers of this regiment, now the 7th Queen's Own Hussars, as I am and have been for some time engaged on its history, perhaps some of your readers may be able to throw light on the matter. Apparently the George Washington in question was never on the active list, and I have been quite unable to find the name mentioned elsewhere in the Record Office military manuscripts. Naturally, if the fact that Washington was ever appointed to the regiment is true, even if only en second, it would be worth recording and would be, moreover, of interest both in this country and America. I am, sir, yours obediently,

C. R. B. BARRETT.

R. V. S. L., Whitehall, S. W., Jan. 23.

THE RED TOP.
(From the painting by Robert Henri.)